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ABSTRACT

Everyone who works with Australian children in early childhood services, regardless of their role or the type of service, faces ethical dilemmas in their work. These situations are complex and not easily resolved. The Australian Early Childhood Association (AECA) Code of Ethics can give guidance in grappling with complicated issues faced in early childhood service. It reminds early childhood professionals what is important in working with young children and their families, with colleagues, in the community, and within the profession. It reaffirms the primary commitment to the well-being of children, regardless of the setting or the role played. This booklet contains the text of the AECA Code of Ethics. It includes background information on the code, such as definitions of key words and phrases, and an explanation of the basis for a code of ethics. It also includes a discussion of the following questions concerning the code: (1) Why do we need one?; (2) Who benefits from having a code?; (3) To whom does the code apply?; (4) How was it developed?; (5) How is the code relevant to the average practitioner?; (6) How does a code of ethics differ from a policy statement, regulations, or other legal obligations?; (7) How will it be enforced?; (8) Is it fixed for all time--that is, will it change?; and (9) What can a code achieve? (TJQ)

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OUR CODE OF ETHICS AT WORK

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OUR CODE OF ETHICS AT WORK

Anne Stonehouse

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone who works with children in early childhood services, regardless of their role or the type of service, faces ethical dilemmas in their work. The following are some ethical dilemmas that may occur. Although the "right" or best resolution may be obvious to you, other people almost certainly will have different views. Ethics is about difficult and complex issues or, as someone has said, the worries about work that keep you awake at night.

You are aware that a fellow student, a single parent with three young children, is borrowing someone else's work and submitting it as her own. She is receiving high marks. Do you say anything to the student, to other students, to the lecturer?

* * *

You are on a practicum at a child care centre. When you arrive one morning, three staff have called in sick, and two new children are there for their first day and are distressed. The director says that she knows it is against course policy to allow students to be alone with a group of children, but in this case she wonders if you would be willing to be with a group of five two year olds for an hour until relief staff arrive. What do you do?

* * *

As a home based care provider, you know that another caregiver in your area regularly has more children at her home than is allowed, as she takes in her neighbour's children on an emergency basis when the neighbour's very elderly mother is ill. The children seem happy and the carer appears to cope well. Do you report her?

* * *

You have stated in advance to your students that you will not accept late assignments. One of your best students comes to you on the afternoon the assignments are due and says that her child was very ill the night before, and that she will not be able to hand in the assignment until tomorrow. Are you willing to accept it?

* * *

Two and a half year old Maria, who has been coming to the centre for over a year, bit three children during the day. Her father has seemed very tense lately. Do you say anything to him when he picks her up at the end of the day? What if he asks how her day was?

* * *

As an adviser, you are working hard to build a good relationship with a new centre. Two parents who use the centre ring you up in your office to report practices that violate licensing regulations. What do you do with the information?

* * *

As a bureaucrat, you are faced with the challenge of "selling" a change in policy that you in fact do not agree with, but one which will win votes in the next election. What do you do?

* * *

A fellow staff member confides in you that she has had a drug problem for some time, but that she is now getting it under control. She asks you not to tell anyone. What do you do with the information?

* * *

Your principal asks you to implement a new behaviour modification program in your preschool. You have some fundamental disagreements with this program. Do you do what you have been asked to?

• • •

A child in your program is extremely disruptive, annoying other children and taking up a lot of your time. His family has been under severe stress. Yours is the only early childhood service in the community. Do you say that he has to be withdrawn from the program?

• • •

These common situations are complex and not easily resolved. The AECA Code of Ethics, while it cannot prescribe the "right" answers , for in fact there is no one right answer or solution for each of these dilemmas, can give guidance in grappling with complicated issues we face in our work. It reminds us of what is most important in our work with young children and their families, with our colleagues, in the community, and within our profession. It re-affirms our primary commitment to the well-being of children, regardless of the setting in which we work, or the role that we play.

The Code of Ethics reminds us of what is most important in our work with young children and their families.

AUSTRALIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS

Preamble

A code of ethics is a set of statements about appropriate and expected behaviour of members of a professional group and, as such, reflects its values. The Code that follows was developed by a National Working Party of the Australian Early Childhood Association, with considerable input from the field, and therefore, is a Code that is owned by the field, not imposed upon it. The Code has been developed to inform and guide the decisions and behaviour of all personnel involved both directly and indirectly in the provision of early childhood services for children between birth and eight years of age. Although oriented towards those who are in daily contact with children and their families, the Code is also intended as a guide for those who work in other capacities, for example, as tertiary educators, administrators, policy makers and advisory staff. Their work impacts significantly on the ethical behaviour of early childhood personnel in the field.

Young children are especially vulnerable. They have little power over their lives and few skills with which to protect themselves. This places early childhood personnel in a relationship of special trust, one that is powerful, important, and easily violated. The vulnerability and powerlessness of young children and the recognition of the multi-faceted dimensions of the role of early childhood personnel serve to highlight the special importance of a code of ethics. As early childhood personnel carry out their work with and on behalf of young children and their families, they often face situations that involve a conflict of their responsibilities and professional values. A code of ethics is not intended to, and could not possibly, provide easy answers, formulae, or prescriptive solutions for the complex professional dilemmas they face in their work. It does provide a basis for critical reflection, a guide for professional behaviour, and some assistance with the resolution of ethical dilemmas.

Adherence to this code necessarily involves a commitment to:

- Viewing the well-being of the individual child as having fundamental importance
- Acknowledging the uniqueness of each person
- Considering the needs of the child in the context of the family and culture, as the family has a major influence on the young child
- Taking into account the critical impact of self esteem on an individual's development
- Basing practice on sound knowledge, research, and theories, while at the same time recognising the limitations and uncertainties of these
- Working to fulfill the right of all children and their families to services of high quality

I. In relation to CHILDREN, I will:

1. Acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of each child.
2. Recognise early childhood as a unique and valuable stage of life and accept that each phase within early childhood is important in its own right.
3. Honour the child's right to play, in acknowledgment of the major contribution play makes to development.
4. Enhance each child's strengths, competence, and self esteem.
5. Ensure that my work with children is based on their interests and needs and lets them know they have a contribution to make.
6. Recognise that young children are vulnerable and use my influence and power in their best interests.
7. Create and maintain safe healthy settings that enhance children's autonomy, initiative, and self worth and respect their dignity.
8. Help children learn to interact effectively, and in doing so to learn to balance their own rights, needs, and feelings with those of others.
9. Base my work with children on the best theoretical and practical knowledge about early childhood as well as on particular knowledge of each child's development.
10. Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.

11. Work to ensure that young children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, language, ability, culture, or national origin.
12. Acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity that children bring to the environment.
13. Engage only in practices that are respectful of and provide security for children and in no way degrade, endanger, exploit, intimidate, or harm them psychologically or physically.
14. Ensure that my practices reflect consideration of the child's perspective.

II. In relation to FAMILIES, I will:

1. Encourage families to share their knowledge of their child with me and share my general knowledge of children with them so that there is mutual growth and understanding in ways that benefit the child.
2. Strive to develop positive relationships with families that are based on mutual trust and open communication.
3. Engage in shared decision making with families.
4. Acknowledge families' existing strengths and competence as a basis for supporting them in their task of nurturing their child.
5. Acknowledge the uniqueness of each family and the significance of its culture, customs, language and beliefs.
6. Maintain confidentiality.
7. Respect the right of the family to privacy.
8. Consider situations from each family's perspective, especially if differences or tensions arise.
9. Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging to the services in which their child participates.
10. Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community context in which it operates.

III. In relation to COLLEAGUES, I will:

1. Support and assist colleagues in their professional development.
2. Work with my colleagues to maintain and improve the standard of service provided in my work place.
3. Promote policies and working conditions that are non-discriminatory and that foster competence, well-being and positive self esteem.
4. Acknowledge and support the use of the personal and professional strengths which my colleagues bring to the work place.
5. Work to build an atmosphere of trust, respect and candour by:
   - encouraging openness and tolerance between colleagues
   - accepting their right to hold different points of view

- using constructive methods of conflict resolution, and
- maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

6. Acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity which my colleagues bring to the work place.
7. Encourage my colleagues to accept and adhere to this code.

IV. In relation to the COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY, I will:

1. Provide programs which are responsive to community needs.
2. Support the development and implementation of laws and policies that promote the well-being of children and families and that are responsive to community needs.
3. Be familiar with and abide by laws and policies that relate to my work.
4. Work to change laws and policies that interfere with the well-being of children.
5. Promote co-operation among all agencies and professions working in the best interests of young children and families.
6. Promote children's best interests through community education and advocacy.

V. In relation to MYSELF AS A PROFESSIONAL, I will:

1. Update and improve my expertise and practice in the early childhood field continually through formal and informal professional development.
2. Engage in critical self-reflection and seek input from colleagues.
3. Communicate with and consider the views of my colleagues in the early childhood profession and other professions.
4. Support research to strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood, and, where possible, initiate, contribute to and facilitate such research.
5. Work within the limits of my professional role and avoid misrepresentation of my professional competence and qualifications.
6. Work to complement and support the child rearing function of the family.
7. Be an advocate for young children, early childhood services, and my profession.
8. Recognise the particular importance of formal qualifications in early childhood studies, along with personal characteristics and experience, for those who work in the early childhood profession.
9. Act in the community in ways that enhance the standing of the profession.

Adopted 1990

The AECA Code of Ethics was developed by a National Working Party consisting of Margaret Clyde, Barbara Creaser, Lyn Fasoli, Barbara Piscitelli, Anne Stonehouse (Convenor), and Christine Woodrow.

[Note: The Code of Ethics of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the United States was an invaluable point of reference for the development of the Australian Code. Some of the items in the Australian Code are worded similarly to items in The NAEYC Code. Permission has been requested and is expected to be received in the near future for using some similar wording.]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many early childhood workers contributed in a major way to the development of the Code. This is very important, because it means that the Code **came from the field and belongs to the field,** that is, to those people who work directly with children under the age of eight in early childhood services or whose work focuses on this age group and services for them. If there is no sense of ownership of the Code by the people by whom and for whom it was developed, then it is of little value. Similarly, if it is seen as "just another nice statement about what we do", and is read once, then filed away and forgotten, it is wasted. This is a possible fate for the Code, and active efforts must be made to prevent this from happening.

The topic of professional ethics, including professional ethics in early childhood, is treated in some journals and books in a very academic and abstract way. These treatments will appeal to some people, but there is a risk that many early childhood workers may see those articles and decide that professional ethics is not for them, that it has little relevance to the issues of concern to them.

The Code of Ethics should be a vitally important "living" document for the early childhood profession, for people at all stages of their professional development. This booklet has been written to introduce people to the Code, to provide some basic information to assist in understanding what it is and what it is not, and how it can be of use in our work with or on behalf of young children. To be meaningful, the Code must be used.

The Code of Ethics should be a "living" document which can be of use to us in our work with children.

Some Definitions

Some key words and phrases used in this booklet are explained below:

Ethics: "A major branch of the discipline of philosophy . . ., concerned with the morality of behaviour, especially in relation to the rightness or wrongness of action.

(Piscitelli, 1989:3)

Code of Ethics: A statement of conduct that comes from the agreed upon values of a group of people working in the same profession.

One very good definition comes from Lilian Katz (1978), who defines a code of ethics as "a set of statements that helps us deal with the temptations inherent in our occupations" (p.3). She writes that a code includes beliefs about:

- what is right rather than expedient,
- what is good rather than simply practical,

- what acts members must never engage in or condone even if those acts would **work** or if members **could get away with** such acts, acts to which they must never be accomplices, bystanders, or contributors. (p.4)

Ethical dilemma: A complex problem or conflict faced in the course of one's work, for which there is more than one solution, each solution having varying degrees of advantage or disadvantage for different people concerned. With ethical dilemmas, there is no clear right answer or solution.

Profession: An organised group of workers who have as their work a social service which deserves due attention and care, such work being for the improvement of society and not for personal gain (Kipnis, 1978).

WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR A CODE OF ETHICS?

A code of ethics is a statement about **practice,** or what we will strive to **do**. It is based on core values, or what we **believe**. Piscitelli (1989:7) defines core values:

> Core professional values in early childhood education reflect the universal values of the entire profession. They are not particular to a single viewpoint, but rather form the foundation for the belief system of the professional and guide the actions of that person.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children produced a list of core values to form a basis for their code of ethics. These include values associated with the child, the family, the public, colleagues, and self. The NAEYC list follows:

- Recognition of each individual as a unique human being
- Realization of the full potential of children and adults
- Environments that foster well-being and positive self-esteem in children, staff and families
- Autonomy and self reliance in children, staff, and families
- Appreciation of the special vulnerability of children and their need for safe and healthy environments
- Recognition that each child is an individual with unique needs and abilities
- Respect for confidentiality and the right of the child and family to privacy
- Development of children: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically
- Use of developmentally appropriate instructional techniques for children
- Appreciation of childhood as a unique and valuable stage in the life cycle
- Professional practice based on the best current knowledge of child growth and development
- Recognition and support for the interconnectedness of the child and family
- Support for families in their task of nurturing children
- Effective protection and advocacy for the rights of children
- Support for the right of all children, regardless of income or other circumstances, to have access to quality early childhood programs

- Unity among people who work in child care settings and co-operation with other professional groups concerned with the welfare of young children
- Continuing growth as professionals in early childhood education (Kipnis, 1987:29)

The AECA Working Party added to this list the following:

- Appreciation of the diversity of cultures within our society and protection of the cultural identity of children in each minority group
- Acknowledgment and use of the power of the media in the promotion of early childhood issues
- Rights of parents to pertinent information about their child

The AECA Code of Ethics is based on these core values.

The core values on which the Code is based supports the right of all children to have access to quality early childhood programs.

WHY DO WE NEED ONE?

There are a number of reasons why the early childhood profession in Australia needs a Code of Ethics.

1. There are **increasing demands made on early childhood workers by parents, funding bodies, management and sponsoring agencies, licensing bodies, and these demands sometimes conflict with each other.** As Katz (1978) says, we are responsible to a number of client groups, whose demands may conflict with each other. Consequently, we may be pulled in different directions. The Code can help us clarify what is most important.
2. We are **working increasingly with people from other disciplines and professions, as well as with people who do not have any formal qualifications.** Their priorities, beliefs about children, and practices may be different from ours. The Code can remind us of our core values, our basic beliefs, and the practices that are fundamental to our work.

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3. ***Questions are often raised about the necessity of having people with formal early childhood qualifications in programs for children,*** as work with young children is sometimes viewed as just an extension of mothering, with the attitude that just about anybody with patience can do it. The Code is a statement about the complexity of being an effective early childhood professional, and the skills and knowledge needed to carry out the roles effectively.

4. There are constant pressures on early childhood services to become more efficient, to expand, to offer more with fewer resources; consequently, the **quality of services is continually under threat.** The Code helps to remind us of what is most important and cannot be compromised in providing services to young children.

5. In the general community, there is a **lack of understanding of what constitutes good early childhood practice.** The Code is a statement that can be used to educate the community.

6. The **status of early childhood workers is low.** There is questioning both within and outside of the field about the professional standing of early childhood workers – whether, in fact, early childhood is a profession. The existence of the Code should have the effect of raising status, as it is one indicator of being a profession.

7. **Events initiated outside our profession impinge greatly on our work for better or for worse** – for example, mergers of tertiary institutions, the development of traineeships, reviews of licensing, award re-structuring, changes in Government policy, re-structuring of Government departments and other initiatives taken by Governments at all levels, or policies or election promises made by political parties. Early childhood professionals have a responsibility to take a stand, and this leads to a need to be clear about what our stand is, where we will compromise and where we will not. The Code will help to make those decisions.

8. **Divisions exist within the profession,** particularly between those who work in so-called care settings and those who "teach" in educational settings. In many cases, these divisions are caused by lack of understanding and misconceptions about the nature of the work in different early childhood settings, and imagined or real threats by one group to affect negatively the status of the other. The Code states what is common to all who work in early childhood settings, and so should bring sectors of the profession closer together.

9. The early childhood professional has always had many roles – imparter of knowledge, adviser to parents, curriculum designer, developmental specialist, nurturer, assessor, to name a few. As the needs of families change, changes in the nature of early childhood services will be required. Consequently, early childhood professionals will have to **take on new roles and responsibilities,** and this can cause confusion. No longer is it functional to think of the early childhood professional as

someone who works exclusively with children. Weiss (1989), in an article titled "From Missionary to Manager: the Changing Role of the Early Childhood Professional", asserts that one of the problems with the profession is that over the years we have added on new roles without shedding old ones. To illustrate her assertion, she points particularly to the increasing trend for early childhood professionals to work in managerial and administrative positions. Meeting the challenges of these positions requires skills and knowledge in addition to those gained in traditional early childhood preparation, and presents new types of ethical dilemmas. The way the Code is structured is itself an indication of the many roles played by early childhood professionals: in relation not only to children, but also to families, colleagues, the community, and the profession. The Code itself is a statement about what it means to be an early childhood professional.

10. Finally, there is **a general lack of professional development activities for highly qualified, experienced professionals.** Most in-service activities are open to any participants who choose to come, from the inexperienced and unqualified to the very experienced and highly qualified, and are therefore pitched at a middle level. Consequently, they may not meet the professional needs of the latter group. Experienced professionals would be interested in exploring a range of complex issues related to a Code of Ethics.

WHO BENEFITS FROM HAVING A CODE?

Early childhood professionals benefit from having a strong statement of standards for behaviour and practice to guide them. The Code will benefit families and children who use early childhood services, that is, the clients, as well. Both children and their parents benefit from the profession having a set of standards for practice. Young children are vulnerable, and adults who are responsible for them have substantial power and superiority. Katz (1978) asserts that where the client is relatively powerless, there is the potential for misuse of power and responsibility. She asserts that the more powerless the client, the more important is a Code of Ethics. Therefore, the existence of a Code of Ethics should be very reassuring to parents who use our services.

TO WHOM DOES THE CODE APPLY?

The Code of Ethics is for anyone who works with or on behalf of children 0-8 years old. This makes our Code different from some other professional codes, as usually a code applies in a formal way to a clearly defined restricted group of people with a particular type of formal qualification, who work in the same profession. While it is likely that people with formal early childhood qualifications will be able to apply the Code with greater insight and understanding than those with other types of formal qualifications or no formal qualifications, the ideal would be for anyone who works with young children to apply it to their work.

Important questions about our status have been dealt with extensively in the early childhood literature over the past few years. These include the question of whether early childhood is a profession by the traditional definition, or by any definition. Also, if it is a profession, then who is eligible to consider themselves members, and who is not? However, in some ways these questions are marginal to the implementation of the Code of Ethics. That is, as is stated in the preamble to the Code, it is an aspirational Code, one that it is hoped all people who work with young children will strive to adhere to, regardless of the level or type of formal qualifications they have. In other words, effective use of the Code does not rest on specific answers to the question of whether or not early childhood is a profession.

HOW WAS IT DEVELOPED?

Early childhood personnel in Australia have been considering a code of ethics for some time. In the past several years they have been very interested in the work of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the United States, and have used that work as a starting point for the development of their own code of ethics. The NAEYC Ethics Commission began work in 1984 to develop a Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment, which was finally approved in July 1989 (Feeney and Kipnis, 1989).

The Code of Ethics of the Australian Early Childhood Association was developed over two years and was approved by AECA in September 1990. The work on the Code was guided and co-ordinated by a National Working Party. From the beginning, it was believed that the process of developing a Code was as important as the product that resulted at the end. Consequently one of the main aims from the beginning was to involve as many people as possible in the field across Australia in thinking about and contributing to the developmental process. To help with this process, the AECA Branch in each State and Territory identified a contact person for the Working Party, who agreed to undertake some work locally to promote participation in the development of the Code.

A resource kit was developed and distributed early in the process. It contained a comprehensive background paper, readings, workshop guides, resource materials, some strategies for getting people to think about ethics, and evaluations, and the contact people were encouraged to offer professional activities related to professional ethics. This request was taken up enthusiastically. In the first half of 1989 a number of activities took place across the country, ranging from large state-wide one day seminars to a series of workshops for a group of kindergarten teachers, to small informal discussion groups with students and practitioners. The degree of interest in the topic was overwhelming.

The feedback received from those sessions was used as a basis for preparing the first draft of the Code. That draft was sent out with a feedback sheet, once again feedback was requested which was used to prepare a second draft. This was circulated for comment, and a final draft was written.

HOW IS THE CODE RELEVANT TO THE AVERAGE PRACTITIONER?

It has been said that only very experienced and mature early childhood professionals will view the Code as meaningful or relevant. This view is that the concerns of experienced professionals have moved away from more concrete issues, and that they have reached a level of competence and confidence that frees them to concern themselves with broader issues such as ethics. However, the author's and others' experience is that professional ethics can be made meaningful to those just starting out in the profession, including students. Members of the Working Party were concerned initially about whether or not many practitioners would view ethics as worth struggling with. They could imagine reactions such as, "I am so busy looking after kids that I don't have time to go to the toilet, and you want me to think about ethics!" However, an enthusiastic response came from all sectors. The issues addressed in developing a Code seemed to strike a chord in the hearts and minds of early childhood professionals from varied backgrounds, with different types of qualifications, and working in different settings.

The Code contains the common principles that apply regardless of the setting in which we work, the particular ages of the children, or in fact whether or not we work directly with children. It is what we aspire to in our work, something to be aimed for, achievable ideals.

Practices in our work place can be looked at in the context of Code items, and in particular when a conflict, problem, or dilemma arises, the Code can be referred to for guidance, although it will not supply answers or solutions. Work in early childhood is too complex for there to be answers that apply across the board or easy solutions. Some people expressed scepticism during the process of developing the Code and then disappointment in the Code, this being the result of their unrealistic expectation that a Code was going to give them answers, tell them what to do in difficult situations. These critics have forgotten that the essence of professional practice is that it is not simple. There are no obvious right and wrong solutions to all problems. Professionals have to use their professional judgement and expertise constantly to resolve complex issues. Consequently, the final product is not a handy guide to professional dilemmas!

The Code can be used with parents to explain the nature of good early childhood practice, what the profession stands for. There are a number of ways it can be used in in-service workshops and discussions.

The Code contains the common principles that apply regardless of the setting in which we work. Practices in our work can be looked at in the context of Code items.

HOW DOES A CODE OF ETHICS DIFFER FROM A POLICY STATEMENT, REGULATIONS OR OTHER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS?

Institutions, government departments, individual services, as well as sponsoring bodies for services may have policies governing their operation. In addition, each State and Territory has regulations and other legal requirements that apply to early childhood services, and a breach of these, if proven, is punishable. Legal requirements are usually quite specific about what is allowable.

The AECA Code of Ethics, as has been stated previously, has come from the profession itself rather than being imposed on the profession from outside. While it is desirable for those that are affected by policy to have a hand in shaping it, this does not always occur. Compliance with legal requirements, and to some extent policy, is monitored from outside the group they apply to, while compliance with a Code of Ethics is monitored from within the group it applies to. Policy is usually service or department specific, whereas a code of ethics transcends service type.

Legal obligations are, quite obviously, mandated by law, and are essential minimal "bottom line" obligations. Failure to meet those obligations leads to some sort of punishment, including exclusion from practice. The AECA Code of Ethics is, on the other hand, aspirational and inspirational in its focus, meaning that it is positive and focuses on desirable or optimal conduct, and is something to aim for. There would be considerable overlap in early childhood practice between what is legal and what is ethical, but it is possible for the two to conflict. That is, what is legal may not be what is ethical; what is ethical may not be legal. This is further evidence of the complexity of ethical issues.

The Code of Ethics is written for individuals, not for services or other work settings, as legislation or policy would be. One of the challenges in developing the Code of Ethics was striking a balance between being general enough to cover all early childhood personnel without being so general that the Code items lose their meaning.

HOW WILL IT BE ENFORCED?

One possibility with a Code of Ethics is to have formal enforcement of a Code as applies in traditional professions, with registration upon entering the profession and de-registration if found to be in breach of the Code. There are people within the early childhood profession who advocate movement toward that in our profession. This is an extremely complex and controversial issue which requires further thought. The final recommendations of the Working Party did not include moving toward formal enforcement. The characteristic of inclusiveness, that is, acceptance and valuing of a range of levels of qualifications and of the worth and contribution of people with no formal qualifications is symptomatic, some would say, of why early childhood does not fit easily into the standard definition of a profession, which is characterised typically by exclusiveness.

A member of the Working Party expressed a view about enforcement:

> On the matter of implementation of the Code of Ethics, I feel that our Code is best described as a guideline to moral conduct within the field. I do not feel that AECA or any other group has the power to bind individuals to such conduct. I feel that AECA can provide the people who work within our field with some clear indicators of their moral duty toward children; this is the purpose of the Code. I would not want to see an enforcement policy in place for the moral conduct of early childhood professionals. To use the power of an external authority to impose standards of conduct on people seems to me to be the opposite of what we had originally intended. Thus, I would prefer to see the Code become a well known and publicised statement which would guide the conduct of practitioners, policy makers and others within the field of early childhood. As such, I feel the existence of the Code will assist people in seeing a unified purpose to their work and in making clearer decisions about difficult issues.
>
> (Piscitelli, 1990, personal communication)

IS IT FIXED FOR ALL TIME – THAT IS, WILL IT CHANGE?

The content of the Code has been thought through carefully. However, as new knowledge is gained, new service types developed, new policies enacted, these will enable the Code to be viewed with new perspectives. It is essential that the Code be looked at continually with a critical eye to ensure that it is relevant and comprehensive There will need to be new items added, and possibly some items altered or deleted. Just as the development of the Code

was a dynamic process, so should the review of the Code be also. AECA will put in place a means of ensuring that the Code is circulated widely and reviewed regularly. Any thoughts, criticisms, or suggestions should be sent to AECA to ensure that the Code remains relevant.

WHAT CAN A CODE ACHIEVE?

This question relates closely to the previous list of reasons that a Code of Ethics is needed. A Code has the potential to be the following:

1. A guide to the beliefs and values of the early childhood profession and what constitutes professional behaviour.

2. When used in in-service education, a basis for early childhood professionals to support each other, to explore solutions to complex questions, to be re-assured that the questions are indeed complex. This in turn will boost morale and strengthen commitment.

3. A tool to provoke discussion about many important topics related to good early childhood practice – for example, discipline, parent-staff relationships, responding to individual needs, and teamwork, to name a few.

4. A statement about what we all have in common, whatever setting we work in, whatever aged children we work with, whether or not we work directly with children, if we make policy, lecture in a college or university, are administrators, advisory staff: therefore, the Code should unite us as a profession.

5. A statement for those thinking of entering the profession or studying to be in the profession about the dimensions of being an early childhood professional. It is no longer appropriate for people to enter the profession who are motivated solely by a desire to work mainly alone with a group of young children. The Code is a statement about the multi-faceted role of the early childhood professional, her or his responsibilities to parents, colleagues, the community, the profession, as well as to children. Considerable attention should be given to the Code in courses that prepare early childhood professionals.

6. A strong statement to the general community about what the profession stands for and the basis for their practice. Most of us are better at **doing** early childhood practice than we are at talking about it effectively. Early childhood practitioners need to be able to speak powerfully, clearly, and objectively about good early childhood practice.

7. A means of raising status, in as much as having a code of ethics is one of the requirements usually listed for being a professional.

8. A step towards gaining greater autonomy for the profession, greater control over the quality of the services offered (Feeney and Sysko, 1986). Currently our practice and the operation of our services is heavily controlled and regulated from outside our profession. A Code represents a major step towards greater internal control.

It must be stressed that these are **potential** outcomes only. Whether they are realised depends entirely on what we do with the Code.

CONCLUSION

The desired fate for the Code is that it could become a strong statement about what we do, about the complexities of our role, that we can use with those thinking of entering the profession, students in early childhood courses, parents, and members of the broader community, as well as with current members of the early childhood profession. In other words, it can be a powerful tool for advocacy with those people who do not understand or appreciate what we do, and for the professional development and support of current members of the profession. It can provide a focus for us to support each other in our efforts to do what is best for children.

Feeney and Sysko (1986:15) have written:

> In a code of ethics, a profession acknowledges its distinctive responsibility to society. In setting standards for the profession, a code gives practitioners guidelines for decision making, to help them resist the temptation to do what is easy or profitable rather than what is right.

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For further information on the AECA Code of Ethics, see the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* Volume 16(1) 1991.